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ABSTRACT

These four papers are from a symposium on changing workplaces. "Women Entrepreneurs: Maintaining Business Success through Human Resource Development" (Dominic G. Kamau, Gary N. McLean, Alexander Ardishvili) investigates contributions of human resource development (HRD) to business success and reports the following: (1) women can be successful in a wide spectrum of business ventures; (2) prior employment, academic education, and professional training play an important role in determining the kind of business enterprise in which to engage; and (3) women entrepreneurs value HRD for themselves and their employees. "Evaluating the Impact of a Union-Management Career Development Program" (Gregory M. Chajnicki, Andrea D. Ellinger) reports more than 95 percent of participants indicated the program enabled them to do the following: (1) think of better ways to perform in new jobs; (2) communicate their experiences and knowledge on new jobs; (3) develop an education plan to learn new skills; and (4) accept more challenging work assignments on new jobs. "The Superiority of Employee-Owned Companies: Reality or Myth?" (Robert B. Gudgel, Fred C. Feitler, Karen Thomas) examines the cultural strength of eight Ohio manufacturing firms and finds nonemployee-owned firms had stronger cultures. "Recruiting and Retaining Women in Business: Women Executives Maneuver To Change the Status Quo" (Laura L. Bierema) shares findings from a focus group of executive women in a Fortune 500 consumer products company, including challenges related to recruitment and retention of women and awareness and actions underlying women's work for organizational change. (YLB)

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Changing Workplace

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Women Entrepreneurs: Maintaining Business Success Through Human Resource Development

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Women entrepreneurs own more than 7.7 million enterprises employing approximately 35% of the labor force in the US. They are important clients for HRD activities. This study investigated the contributions of HRD to business success. Women entrepreneurs recognize the need for HRD, for both themselves and their employees. Some women entrepreneurs have their employees participate in formal HRD programs, but many do not have formalized programs. Practitioner and research opportunities exist for HRD professionals.

Keywords: Organizational Development, Change, Systems

Entrepreneurs are not a homogeneous group; they can be grouped by ethnicity, immigrant group, gender, age, or other criteria. Each group of entrepreneurs has its own distinct characteristics, challenges, and opportunities. Hisrich and Brush (1985), Kaplan (1988), and Moore and Buttner (1997) have presented women as one of the fastest growing groups of entrepreneurs. Currently, according to Moore and Buttner (1997), women own more than 7.7 million firms that employ approximately 35% of the labor force in the United States.

According to Miner (1996), "real similarities and real differences exist between men and women entrepreneurs" (p. 141). He based this assertion on years of research on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship development. Women entrepreneurs may experience a different set of challenges in their entrepreneurial lives from other groups of entrepreneurs. Thompson (1995) stated that women entrepreneurs experience difficulties in getting capital and training and are restrained by household and child-rearing responsibilities. Hisrich and Brush (1985) also stated that women entrepreneurs lack support systems that would facilitate their efforts.

Women entrepreneurs are not a homogeneous group, either. Moore and Buttner (1997) pointed to the danger of treating women entrepreneurs as a single group: "Previous findings that had yielded a single profile of female entrepreneurs as being primarily sole proprietors with similar educational backgrounds and a basic interest in extending home skills into the marketplace no longer fit" (p. 2).

Despite the differences among women entrepreneurs, it is possible to study women entrepreneurs as a distinct entity. Prospective women entrepreneurs are likely to benefit from learning about the success stories of other women entrepreneurs. Experienced women entrepreneurs who participate in a study on women entrepreneurs may reap intrinsic benefits by sharing their experiences. Women entrepreneurs may experience such problems as conflicting role expectations and responsibilities. Experienced women entrepreneurs will probably have overcome unique problems in their entrepreneurial journeys. Sharing their experiences in a research project would be helpful to prospective women entrepreneurs and others who may not be as successful.

In spite of increased research on entrepreneurship, very little is known about women entrepreneurs (Moore & Buttner, 1997). Thompson (1995) acknowledged "the missing gender dimension in studies of entrepreneurs" (p. 107). Earlier, Hisrich and Brush (1985) had decried the lack of studies on women entrepreneurs. There is need to increase our knowledge of women entrepreneurs.

People learn from role models. Prospective women entrepreneurs are likely to learn from successful women entrepreneurs—*role models* (Williamson, 1988). Profiles of successful women entrepreneurs are likely to provide prospective women entrepreneurs with reference points for their own entrepreneurial journeys. Stories of success may in fact be an inspiration and a target at which to aim in order to succeed. Recognition of research participants as successful entrepreneurs may be a morale booster in their already successful entrepreneurial journeys.

Statement of the Problem and Purposes

Entrepreneurship is emerging as the defining trend of the business world of the 21st century, driven by student demand. No field of business education is growing faster today than that of entrepreneurship. More than 120 accredited business schools are offering entrepreneurship as a major (Bronner, 1998). Many U. S. high schools, community colleges, technical colleges, and universities have entrepreneurship development programs (Pitman, 1988; Van Hook, 1987; Williamson, 1988). Vesper (1996) stated that there are over 400 universities and colleges that offer entrepreneurship courses and/or entrepreneurship concentrations. Stewards and Boyd (1989) suggested that entrepreneurial education was a realistic alternative for women and minorities. The researchers in this study believe that entrepreneurial programs for women are worthwhile investments. Such programs should of necessity draw from the experiences of women entrepreneurs--their stories need to be told or they need to appear as resource persons in entrepreneurship development programs. Hence, there is a need to develop descriptive profiles of successful women entrepreneurs.

In this study, stories of successful women entrepreneurs will be documented for the purposes of providing role models for women entrepreneurship development. The researchers will also describe how these women entrepreneurs generated business ideas and identified business opportunities that they considered would lead to success. The researchers will describe the critical points in the lives of these women entrepreneurs; the strategies employed by these women entrepreneurs to ensure success; the strategies used by these women entrepreneurs for recruiting, developing, and maintaining human resources; and the meaning of business growth to these women entrepreneurs.

Need for the Study

The researchers are aware of the criticisms leveled by Low and MacMillan (1988) at studies on personality or cultural background of entrepreneurs. The gender of the entrepreneur would probably fall under the same criticism. In spite of the criticism, little is known about this important segment of entrepreneurial population (Moore & Buttner, 1997; Thompson, 1995). Therefore, the researchers consider a study on women entrepreneurs to be a valuable addition to our knowledge of entrepreneurship.

Further, Moore and Buttner (1997) have stated, "Among the things revealed by broader and more intense scrutiny was that practically nothing was known about female entrepreneurs" (p. 12). The scrutiny Moore and Buttner were referring to was on the advances made in research on entrepreneurship. There is simply not enough information on women entrepreneurs. Therefore, there is a need to add to our knowledge through research about this fast growing group of entrepreneurs.

In addition, reporting about the successes made by women in the business world has been largely negative because emphasis has been placed on what they have not achieved rather than on what they have achieved (O'Brien, 1998). Though O'Brien was commenting on popular reporting in the media, it is the desire of the researchers to present a broader view of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs have demonstrated that they have the capacity to participate fully in national economic development. Researchers in entrepreneurship should have more studies on successful women entrepreneurs in order to match the growth needs of women entrepreneurs.

Relevance of the Study

Women entrepreneurs as a group constitute one of the largest sources of employment for the labor force. This is likely to continue to increase as women-owned ventures continue to grow. As employers of labor, women entrepreneurs have concerns related to human resource development. HRD concerns for women entrepreneurs are threefold--entrepreneurial development for the women entrepreneurs themselves, personal development for the women entrepreneurs, and human resource development for their employees.

HRD practitioners and researchers in HRD cannot afford to ignore such a large employer of human resources. The researchers studied women entrepreneurs in order to identify issues related to human resource development for women entrepreneurs and their employees. HRD practitioners need to know the needs of women

entrepreneurs in order to do business with them, and they need models to share in their HRD practices. This study on women entrepreneurs and how they recognized business opportunities, how they achieved success in their businesses, and how they dealt with human resource issues will be a valuable addition to studies on women entrepreneurs.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives for this study are:

1. To develop detailed descriptions of some successful women entrepreneurs operating businesses in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.
2. To determine how these women entrepreneurs generate business ideas.
3. To determine how these women entrepreneurs identify and evaluate business opportunities.
4. To record the ideas of these women entrepreneurs on human resources and HRD.
5. To record what these successful women entrepreneurs consider to be the critical points in their entrepreneurial lives.
6. To determine what business growth means to these women entrepreneurs in relation to their businesses.
7. To identify strategies these women use to ensure business growth.
8. To discern the lessons these women entrepreneurs can offer to prospective women entrepreneurs and less successful women entrepreneurs.

Research Question

Moore and Buttner (1997) found that some women entrepreneurs have been able to move beyond the glass ceiling. The central question for this study is: *What lessons can we learn from a group of successful women entrepreneurs?* Of main interest to the researchers are the lessons related to human resource development for women entrepreneurs and their employees.

Constraints of the Study

This is a case study of some women entrepreneurs operating in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The methodology does not require nor permit generalization. Interviewing is the method of data collection and may affect the quality of data collected. The selection of the research participants was done by referrals which involved a subjective judgment (in terms of who is successful) on the part of the referrers. However, more detailed information is collected using interviews than when using other methods of data collection.

Review of Literature

The literature reviewed explored the meaning of entrepreneurship, general issues of entrepreneurship, groups of entrepreneurs that have been studied before, and available literature on women entrepreneurs.

Meaning of Entrepreneurship

There is no agreement about the meaning of entrepreneurship. Cochran (1968) explained that the word "entrepreneur" has developed to mean an adventurer and a person who bears uncertainty. He added that, besides having to supply capital, entrepreneurs must have judgment, perseverance, knowledge of business, innovative approaches, and an ability to lead/manage. He further noted that entrepreneurship can be exercised by business people as well as non-business people.

Brandstatter (1997) also had difficulty with the word "entrepreneur." To him entrepreneur entailed business ownership, decision-making power, leadership, or size of company. He saw entrepreneurs as business owners or top managers of a company, referring to the latter group as dependent or employed entrepreneurs.

Lumpkin and Dess (1996) also recognized the lack of consensus in characterizing entrepreneurship, leading to difficulties in investigating relationships of entrepreneurship and other business variables such as performance. They concluded that it is unlikely that there will be consensus regarding the meaning of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in the near future.

Researchers normally find it necessary to define what entrepreneurship means for them and their research. For the purposes of this study, women entrepreneurs will be those women who own businesses and/or take active roles in management of business ventures, be they sole proprietorships, partnerships, or corporations. The venture should be making annual revenues from sales or fees of \$500,000 or more. An earlier study by Moore and Buttner (1997) had a lower range of annual revenues of \$250,000 to \$499,999. The reason for using a higher revenue criterion was the fact that the study is targeting successful women entrepreneurs. Another criterion for inclusion in this study was the venture's potential for growth. The researchers are aware that success can be defined in terms other than revenues (Moore & Buttner, 1997; O'Brien, 1998). However, a quantitative value would give a more consistent measure of success than a subjective one would. The researchers began the research study by using qualitative measures of success, that is, asking leaders of associations to identify successful women entrepreneurs within their membership. The leaders of the participating associations did not have access to the financial details of their members. Thus, initial identification of successful woman entrepreneurs was based on subjective criteria or a combination of criteria.

Research in Entrepreneurship

There are many studies on entrepreneurship, several of which have been presented at conferences on entrepreneurship research. Babson College has been holding annual conferences on entrepreneurship research since 1981. These conferences have included both general entrepreneurship and specific classes of entrepreneurs.

Classes of Entrepreneurs

Moore and Buttner (1997) have described two types of entrepreneurs--traditional and modern. They stated that traditional women entrepreneurs tended to be in sole proprietor service businesses and remained small and slow growing. They contrasted traditional with modern women entrepreneurs who engage in a variety of occupations and have experience in the business world through better preparation in technical and planning skills and social networks. Miner (1996) developed a classification of four types of entrepreneurs--personal achievers, super-salespersons, real managers, and expert idea generators. Entrepreneurs could also be classified on the basis of their social background, gender, national origin, type of business (service, manufacturing, construction), and ethnicity. Brandstatter (1997) studied Austrian entrepreneurs and found that there is a difference between those entrepreneurs who founded their businesses and those who inherited businesses or entered into business ownership through marriage. Each group of entrepreneurs is likely to experience different opportunities and challenges from other classes of entrepreneurs.

Women Entrepreneurs

In a study of women and minority entrepreneurs, Hisrich and Brush (1985) reported that 90% of women entrepreneurs operated service businesses, while other groups of entrepreneurs had other types of businesses, such as construction and manufacturing. They also found that women and minority entrepreneurs experienced similar problems of finance, lack of training, and focusing primarily on service-oriented businesses. Moore and Buttner (1997) reported, however, that women entrepreneurs are now entering into non-female businesses of finance, insurance, manufacturing, and construction.

Brush and Hisrich (1988) investigated the strategic origins of women entrepreneurs and their relationships to the growth of their business ventures. Earlier, Hisrich and Brush (1987) had studied women entrepreneurs for personal characteristics, family background, and management skills and their impact on business success and growth. Kaplan (1988) also investigated the reasons women change from employment to business ownership.

Research Methodology

This research was designed as case studies of successful women entrepreneurs operating in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota. Information was collected from the research participants through face-to-face interviews. All interviews were held on the premises of the research participants, except for one. The researchers utilized interpretive research designed to collect information, stories, and experiences from women entrepreneurs who were considered successful by their colleagues or leaders in business organizations.

Research Design

Initial plans were to interview thirty successful women entrepreneurs. Twenty women entrepreneurs agreed to participate in the study. Four of the research participants did not meet the criteria (\$500,000 annual sales or fees) for inclusion in the study. An interview guide was developed, but the interviews were largely unstructured. The research participants were allowed to make uninterrupted responses.

Research Participants

The selection of research participants was largely through referrals by leaders of associations of business owners and other business support groups, such as funding agencies. Leaders in the St. Paul Area Chamber of Commerce, the Midway Chamber of Commerce, The Collaborative, and the Milestone Growth Fund made referrals of women entrepreneurs whom they thought had been successful. Personal referrals were also made by women entrepreneurs in the course of interviews. Directories were also a source of valuable information for contacts. In this regard, the national directory of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) was used as a source of contact information for women business owners. Numerous efforts to contact (by telephone and letters) the leaders of the Minnesota Chapter of NAWBO were unsuccessful.

Instrumentation and Validation

The study was designed from an interpretive perspective. Its validity is built on agreement between the researchers and the participants on the themes emerging from the interviews or conversations. The following questions were used in the interviews:

1. Explain how you began your operations.
2. Describe the nature of your business.
3. How do you determine that a business opportunity will be successful?
4. Describe the critical points in your entrepreneurial life.
5. What does human resources mean for your business?
6. What does human resource development mean for you and your business?
7. Explain what business growth means for you and your business.
8. Describe your strategies for ensuring business growth.
9. What advice would you give to other women entrepreneurs, especially prospective ones?
10. What additional comments on any topic/issue related to women entrepreneurship would you like to make?

Individual interviews were held with 16 women entrepreneurs. The interviews were conversational as much as possible with the research participant being allowed as much time as desired to answer questions. Interviews continue to be held as research participants are identified. The interviews were tape recorded for those who had no objections. One interview was recorded manually at the request of the interviewee. Tape recordings were transcribed and hard copies made to enable analysis. Background information of the entrepreneurs was also collected from the entrepreneurs in the course of the interviews. The research participants have committed themselves to provide additional information whenever needed. To ensure validity of the data collected, the research participants will be provided with a summary of their transcripts and be invited to make written corrections of any misrepresentations of their views or facts.

Analysis

Analysis entailed development of descriptions and identification of themes from the transcripts of the tape-recorded interviews. Dominant themes were identified regarding the critical points in their entrepreneurial careers, the meaning of business growth and strategies for growth, and human resource development practices. Themes were identified by the frequency of their occurrence. In the final report, the findings will be supported by extensive quotes from the research participants.

Findings

Findings are based on the interviews and any materials made available by the research participants to the researchers. The findings (and themes) identified fall under operations, idea generation, evaluation of opportunities, critical points, human resource development, business growth and success, sources of support, and advice to other women entrepreneurs.

Nature of Operations

These women entrepreneurs are engaged in a variety of business ventures. Some of these women are engaged in businesses that require a high level of professional education and training, such as engineering or law. One woman called these ventures "high barrier" ventures. Most were involved in the sale of services, such as translation, marketing research, and human resource services. Others were engaged in what would be termed "low barrier" ventures, such as dealing with processing and trading (e. g., bakery). There is no one category of business venture that can be said to belong to these women entrepreneurs. They are in all aspects of the business world.

Business Idea Generation

These women largely entered into business areas in which they had prior experience as employees, or they had adequate academic and professional training, or in areas where they served a very special need. Employment served as a good training ground for entrepreneurship. One woman entrepreneur with a large staffing business began as a clerical employee in the company she now owns. Academic and professional training also played a key role in determining which business to operate. Academic and professional education in engineering and law played a part in the decision of women entrepreneurs in those fields. Of those who did not have experience in their business areas, one had a franchise (bakery) and the other was in the translation business—a special need among her Asian community. Now she has personnel to translate into Eastern European, Japanese, and African languages.

Evaluation of Business Opportunities

Some of the women drew elaborate business plans, but others used intuition to determine which business ventures would be successful. At the initial stages of a business venture, evaluation of business opportunities is largely by intuition. It is only when the businesses have achieved considerable growth do these women entrepreneurs draw business plans. Where business plans have been used, they have been contracted out.

Critical Points

Initial analysis indicates that the first two years in business are critical and have fond memories of family support. Strong support came from the spouse, but in most cases it has included other members of the family, including fathers, mothers, and grandmothers. Partnerships have not worked well for those women entrepreneurs who have tried them. Partners have not been faithful as far as financial resources are concerned, or the women entrepreneurs did not consider seeking a partnership relationship. One partner explained how she came back from leave only to find her partner had left the business, yet she was the one in charge of financial resources. Because of that partner, she had to reduce her staff to continue in business. A partnership with her spouse has worked well. Another partnership in a legal profession has also worked well. These two partnerships have worked well because the partners have worked responsibilities based on individual expertise.

Human Resource Development

For the large business ventures owned or operated by women, HRD programs are based on the needs of the ventures. For example, two women entrepreneurs' businesses provide care for vulnerable adults—the elderly and adults with developmental/mental disabilities, where training and retraining of employees is required for state registration. Training programs are needed to remain in business. The other women brought with them skills (mainly technical and professional), hired those with skills that they need, and, to a lesser extent, sought programs for human resource development. However, all women entrepreneurs valued human resources and human resource development. One woman engineer running her own business said that all that they sell is “between the ears.”

Business Growth and Success

These women are capable of achieving high levels of business growth. One has grown a corporation into annual revenues of over two hundred million dollars. She has been the president of the company since its inception. Two others have gone beyond the one million dollar mark. The majority of the women interviewed have achieved gross revenues between \$500,000 and one million dollars. Two have not reached the \$500,000 mark, in spite of this being one of the criteria for being interviewed. One of these has the potential to become a multi-million dollar business. The other is unlikely to reach this mark in the next two years. Most of the women entrepreneurs interviewed are not enthusiastic about unchecked growth. One expressed concern about how to disengage herself. In her view, the bigger her venture grows, the more difficult it will be for her to sell it when she decides to retire.

Sources of Support

The greatest source of support for these women is the immediate family (spouse, mother, father, and children). The spouse was cited as the most important source of emotional and financial support. All stressed the need to have an understanding spouse to encourage and give financial support at the initial stages of the business venture. Two women have their spouse as their partner. In both cases, the women were the initiators of the businesses. One woman found her greatest support from her grandmother who co-signed for the first loan for the business. Women's associations were also a source of support. One woman gave an example where she and other women act as board members for each other's businesses.

Advice to Prospective Women Entrepreneurs

The most frequent advice is that of being persistent in their pursuit of business goals (don't give up) and building good personal working relationships with bankers, professionals (accountants, lawyers) that one may hire, clients, employees, and family.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The following conclusions, implications for HRD, and recommendations for further research apply:

1. Women entrepreneurs can be successful in a wide spectrum of business ventures—in “high barrier-high return” as well as “low barrier-low return” ventures. Some of these women have found success in areas that have been male dominated.
2. Prior employment, academic education, and professional training play an important role in determining the kind of business enterprise in which to engage. These women sought business opportunities in areas in which they had experience as employees or have professional preparation. None of the participants had considered entering a business that was completely new to what she already knew or did. Only the Asian woman in the translation business was an exception. However, she is in an area with high demand and little competition.
3. Intuition as well as business planning played a role in evaluation of business opportunities.
4. Strong family and professional relationships are important for success in entrepreneurship. They also need good customer relations.
5. Women entrepreneurs value human resource development for both themselves and their employees. Some employees attend regular training in keeping with government regulations. One woman includes training in the

- budget for new hires. Many women expressed a desire for professional development to help them run their businesses in a better way--accounting and management were mentioned frequently.
6. Women entrepreneurs can act as role models for other entrepreneurs, women or men. Through associations, women entrepreneurs can help one another, including prospective women entrepreneurs.

Implications for HRD

HRD professionals should accord women entrepreneurs the importance they deserve as clients for HRD activities. Women entrepreneurs have training and organization development needs, for themselves, their employees, and their organizations.

Recommendations for Further Research

Much more information is needed in the area of women in entrepreneurial environments. This study needs to be replicated many times to continue adding interpretive knowledge and information to the insights gained in this study. Research into the specific HRD needs of women entrepreneurs—training and development, organization development, and career development—will all add useful information. Teaching case studies developed from research cases will provide useful material for entrepreneurial development activities. Additional descriptive research will also be useful in provide more information about "modern" women entrepreneurs. It would also be helpful to determine the characteristics that allow some women to succeed in entrepreneurship, while others fail.

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Evaluating the Impact of a Union-Management Career Development Program

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The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact of a career development program in a steel plant which recently underwent severe restructuring and downsizing. Impact was measured in four specific areas: employee's perceptions about the effect of the program on their past job, during transition, on a new job, and socially. Using a descriptive survey design based upon a non-random sample of 129 active participants in the program, this study also examined the reasons for participation and the utilization levels of various career development activities.

Keywords: Career Development, Program Evaluation, Union-Management Partnership

Learning and learning-how-to-learn have become critical competencies in the modern workforce (Dixon, 1990; Senge, 1990; Zuboff, 1988). Yet, despite the investments that are being made in formal, informal, and on-the-job training to foster learning in the workplace, few organizations in the United States are evaluating the effectiveness, merit, or worth of these training programs (Hilbert, Preskill & Russ-Eft, 1997; Preskill, 1994). Although numerous models of training program evaluation exist, Kirkpatrick's four-step approach or four-level model (Hilbert, Preskill & Russ-Eft, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 1994) is one that is most often used by practitioners despite some of its limitations (Holton, 1996). In Kirkpatrick's model, there are four levels of possible training outcomes: reactions, learning, behavior, and results (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Reactions, Level 1, are intended to examine what the trainees think and feel about the training received. Learning, Level 2, is the extent to which trainees have increased their knowledge and skills as a result of the training. Behaviors, Level 3, relate to the extent to which trainees are using the new knowledge and skills they have acquired. Results, Level 4, seek to examine how the training has had an impact on the organization. This model serves as the framework for this evaluation study.

Definitions associated with career development focus on either the wholeness of an individual or the balance between the needs and development of an employee and an organization. When career development is primarily individual-centered it deals with the needs, wants, capacities, and potential of the whole person including environmental pressures, significant others, and social responsibilities to children and aging parents (Wolfe & Kolb, 1980). When career development is primarily organization-centered it can be defined as an organized, formalized, planned effort to achieve a balance between individual needs and organization workforce requirements. Organization career development integrates and links its activities with the human resource function of an organization and refines basic human resources activities (Leibowitz, Farren & Kaye, 1986). The program in this study views career development as individual-centered without a formal link to the human resource functions within the plant.

The current study was designed to evaluate the impact of a unique union-sponsored Career Development Program within the steel industry and reports the findings from a recently conducted impact evaluation. This Career Development Program is an example of a union-management partnership that is centered around work-life issues. Its beginnings can be traced back to the 1970s with the United Autoworkers and General Motors. This particular program is one of 52 national programs sponsored by the United Steelworkers and 13 participating steel companies with a yearly enrollment level of 34,000 employees and total funding approaching \$120 million (Institute for Career Development, 1997).

The subject of this research is a Career Development Program that was created in 1992 at a steel company with 3,500 eligible employees. Participation in this comprehensive program is voluntary. Primary program services include tuition assistance, basic skills courses, pre-technical and trade training, computer training, personal development workshops, and career counseling. This program, in particular, has encountered tremendous challenges to its mission as a result of drastic organizational changes including a potential merger with a foreign steelmaker, department and position restructuring, the introduction of new manufacturing technology, and large-scale downsizing which eventually led to a complete plant shut-down in the first quarter of 1998. Apart from annual interest surveys and course evaluations, there was little information on what kind of impact this program had on the lives of its participants.

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Despite the local plant shut-down, a major obstacle to continued national growth and effectiveness in administering the more than 50 nationwide programs is the lack of a systematic evaluation model or framework. Only a small number of somewhat related programs have been studied to determine their impact, and most of this research has been associated with the United Autoworkers, General Motors Corporation, and the University of Michigan (Lawler, 1992). Furthermore, regardless of the methods of evaluation that practitioners may subscribe to, the majority of research relates to measuring training at levels that do not exceed participant reaction (Brinkerhoff, 1989; Holton, 1996; Kirkpatrick, 1994).

The lack of systematic evaluation within this national program, and specifically at this steel plant became the impetus for this initial study. This study focuses on post-participant reactions, participant perceptions of learning, the extent to which skills and knowledge improved, and the application of these skills in new settings. It is the first attempt within the steel industry to evaluate a Career Development Program based on a review of research literature surrounding union-sponsored career development activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study sought to evaluate the impact of a multi-service career development program on its participating employees as they experienced the results of organizational restructuring, downsizing, and finally, plant shut-down. Specifically in this study, impact referred to the employees' perceptions about the effect their participation in the program had in four areas: their past job at the steel plant, their transition period following lay-off, their new job, and social roles and interactions.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What was the initial reason for employee involvement in the program?
2. Did anyone encourage employees to get involved in the program?
3. Did any barriers restrict greater employee involvement?
4. What career development activities had the highest levels of participation?
5. Did participating employees believe their participation had a positive impact on a) their past job, b) their transition period immediately after lay-off, c) their new job (if applicable), and d) their social roles and interactions?
6. Did a participant's educational level or job classification make a difference in their perception of a positive impact?

Additionally, it was anticipated that this research could offer a profile of the typical active Career Development Program participant within this national union-sponsored program.

Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey research design. A questionnaire was developed to address each of the research questions. The questionnaire was divided into four major sections: Participant Information, Program Services, Program Impact, and Personal Experiences. The Participant Information section included demographic information, and questions relating to reasons for initial program involvement, encouragement by others, and reasons for not getting further involved in the program. The Program Services section attempted to ascertain the services most used by this target population. The Program Impact section included 24 personal development statements associated with job responsibilities at the steel plant, during the transition period, on a new job, and social roles and interactions. The Personal Experiences section offer participants the opportunity to describe how the program impacted their life, how the program could be improved, and what was most valuable about the program. These items were measured using Likert scales, multiple choice, and open-ended responses.

The survey instrument was piloted with a random sample of 5 participants from the target population of 129 active participants. This target population was selected by including employees who had participated in two primary services of the program: tuition assisted courses and on-site, customized courses over a two year period. Because of their demonstrated participation, it was anticipated that this target group would have the best overall understanding of the program mission and services. After a debriefing with each member of the pilot study one-on-one and in a group, a final survey instrument was compiled that incorporated their recommendations regarding question order and terminology.

The survey was administered to a non-random sample of 129 members of the target population of a most active participants. Surveys were coded for tracking purposes. A self-addressed, postage paid envelope accompanied the confidential survey to enhance the response rate. A follow-up mailing was done 3 weeks after the initial mailing. A total of 83 surveys were received during a 6 week period yielding a 64% response rate. It should be noted that the plant shut-down occurred during the implementation of this questionnaire.

Data from the survey were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Survey responses were entered into a microcomputer spreadsheet in the order they were received. Descriptive statistics including mean, standard deviation, frequencies, and percentages of the data were calculated. The frequencies were rank ordered to identify their relative importance. Correlational analyses were also conducted to determine the relationship between perceived impact and both educational level and job classification. Responses to open-ended questions on the survey were thematically analyzed, however, this paper reports the findings from the quantitative analyses.

Findings

The major findings of this study are organized and presented in the order of the research questions:

Question 1: What is the initial reason for employee involvement in the program?

This question seeks to understand initial employee involvement before the fate of the plant became obvious. Table 1 depicts the reasons for the initial involvement with frequencies and percentages for each response. As shown, the overwhelming reason for participation was to prepare for a job in another industry. Other primary reasons for participation included preparing for company-sponsored training and preparing for retirement.

Table 1. Reasons for Initial Program Involvement (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Prepare for a job in another industry	68	82.9
Prepare for company-sponsored training	28	34.1
Prepare for retirement	27	32.9
Prepare for transfer or promotion within the company	18	22.0
Discover a new hobby interest	11	13.4
Meet new people or socialize	10	12.2
Brush-up for a college course(s)	5	6.0
For general knowledge or just enjoy learning	4	4.9
To complete a college degree	4	4.9
Wanted to get my GED	3	3.7

Question 2: Did anyone encourage employees' involvement in the program?

This question examined the extent to which employees were encouraged by others to become involved in this program. Table 2 reveals that nearly one-third of participants did not respond to this question. It is possible that for some individuals, self-realization and motivation were sufficient to get involved in the Career Development Program, however, given the responses, this is purely speculation. For others, the encouragement from friends, family and role models may be needed to move from contemplation of potential program benefits to active involvement. Co-workers encouraging employees to become involved in this program was the primary response cited in the survey.

Table 2. Individuals Who Encouraged Program Involvement (n=52)

	Frequency	Percentage
No response	32	61.5
Co-worker	28	53.8
Union representative	18	34.6
Spouse or family member	18	34.6
Company representative (other than foreman)	11	21.2
Program staff or instructors	3	5.7
Foreman or supervisor	2	3.8

Question 3: Did any barriers exist that prevented greater program involvement?

This question examined the potential barriers that employees perceived to be impediments to becoming more involved in the program. Table 3 indicates that while several barriers were perceived to prevent greater participation, almost one-half of respondents indicated they were as involved as they wanted to be. Work shifts were deemed the primary impediment to greater involvement. This is not unusual in a three-shift production environment.

Table 3. Types of Barriers Preventing Greater Program Involvement (n=74)

	Frequency	Percentage
I am/was as involved as I wanted to be in the program	33	44.6
Work shifts	20	27.0
Overtime	12	16.2
Too busy looking for a job	11	14.8
Worried about possible transfer to another plant	10	13.5
Confused about which courses/programs to take	9	12.2
Program no longer offered anything of interest to me	4	5.4
Health condition of myself, spouse, or family member	4	5.4
Spouse or family did not support my involvement	0	0.0

Question 4: What career development activities had the highest levels of participation?

This question was intended to measure the level of activity in other areas of the program. The program offers a wide variety of training and development services which include on-site courses, tuition assistance, career counseling, career and educational resource material, computer facilities, and staff support. Information regarding enrollment in on-site courses and tuition assistance is tracked separately in a program database. Table 4 depicts the 11 activities there were included in the survey. Respondents rated each activity on a Likert scale from 0 to 3 (0 indicated no participation and 3 indicated a high level of participation). The highest responses provided by participants are associated with information provided by the program staff, career days which highlight high-demand occupational areas and related educational opportunities, and annual interest surveys mailed to each eligible employee.

Since career development treats the progression of jobs in one's lifetime and issues dealing with work/life balance, the following four areas were included in the survey to get a broader view of the program's impact on each participant: past job, transition period, new job (if applicable), and social roles/interactions. Each area or dimension of career development has six concrete examples which attempt to define the meaning of the dimension. Respondents are asked to rate each example on a Likert scale of 0 to 3 (0 indicated no impact and 3 indicated a high level of impact). The rank provided with each example is the overall rank based on 24 total examples regardless of dimension.

The first dimension examined the impact of the program on the participant's job within the steel plant. This dimension measured the most immediate impact the program was likely to have on a participant's daily work responsibilities. Table 5 shows that the program had the lowest overall impact on this dimension. The highest response within this area was attributed to the program helping a participant seek more challenging work assignments.

Table 4. Rank of Program Activities Other Than On-Site Courses and Tuition Assistance (n=81)

	Mean	SD
Information from program staff	2.17	0.84
Career Days	2.16	0.95
Annual interest surveys	1.59	1.15
Education Fairs	1.47	1.16
Job Search Information	1.41	1.09
Computer lab activities	1.24	1.02
Resource library	1.09	0.98
Career counseling	0.88	0.93
Education referral network	0.62	0.80
Summer workshops on personal development topics	0.59	0.89
Study groups and/or Tutoring services	0.51	0.87

Question 5: Did participating employees believe their participation had a positive impact on a) their past job, b) their transition period immediately after lay-off, c) their new job (if applicable), and d) their social roles and interactions?

Table 5. Rank of Examples Associated with Impact on Past Job (n=82)

	Mean	SD	Rank
Seek more challenging work assignments	1.46	1.14	18
Think of better ways to do a task or project	1.40	1.10	19
Increase the effectiveness of my communication skills	1.37	1.08	20
Work better with my co-workers	1.35	1.03	21
Listen to and follow directions on the job	1.27	1.12	22
Manage my time better on the job	1.24	1.09	24

The second dimension looked at the impact of the program in the transition phase immediately following job separation. This dimension included retraining and job search activities to help participants recognize their transferable skills and unique experiences. Out of the four dimension, this dimension ranked second in overall impact. Table 6 shows that the program most helped participants understand local job conditions and trends.

Table 6. Rank of Examples Associated with Impact on Transition Period (n=77)

	Mean	SD	Rank
Understand local job conditions and trends	2.31	0.67	3
Improve writing skills for resumes and applications	2.23	0.93	8
Develop an educational plan to learn new job skills	2.18	0.72	10
Develop a plan to identify/select the best job prospects	2.17	0.85	12
Contact potential employers & interviewing skills	2.17	0.67	11
Improve reading skills for use in retraining activities	1.94	0.94	14

The third dimension focused on the participant in their new job, if applicable. At least 53 respondents answered these questions. This dimension ranked first in overall impact. Table 7 shows that the program helped participants in a new job seek more challenging work assignments.

Table 7. Rank of Examples Associated with Impact on New Job (n=53)

	Mean	SD	Rank
Seek more challenging work assignments	2.39	0.75	1
Increase the effectiveness of my communication skills	2.33	0.67	2
Listen to and follow directions on the job	2.26	0.78	5
Think of better ways to do a task or project	2.26	0.67	4
Manage my time better on the job	2.23	0.79	6
Work better with my new co-workers	2.19	0.95	9

The fourth dimension looked at a participant's social roles and interactions. This dimension was included to satisfy the work/life balance associated with career development programs. Another reason to include those participants who sought retirement or not an immediate transition into a new job. Out of the four dimensions, this one ranked third. Table 8 shows that the program most helped participants use a computer to learn new things.

Table 8. Rank of Examples Associated with Impact on Social Aspects (n=70)

	Mean	SD	Rank
Use a computer to learn new things	2.23	0.91	7
Improve readings skills at home	2.04	0.86	13
Try new hobbies or leisure activities	1.91	0.96	16
Enhance my role as a spouse or parent	1.91	0.82	15
Become a smarter, more informed shopper or customer	1.61	0.89	17
Increase my involvement in church/community group	1.24	0.94	23

Question 6: Did a participant's educational level or job classification make a difference in their perception of a positive impact?

Survey data were analyzed for correlations that may exist based on a participant educational level (low grade indicates less than or equal to 12 years of formal education and high grade indicates more than 12 years of formal education) and job classification (craft job position versus non-craft job position). Perceived impact differences according to educational level were noticed in the following items: challenging work assignments on the past job, listening and following directions on the past job, managing time on the past job, improving social reading skills, and attempting new hobbies/leisure interest. Perceived impact differences according to job classification were noticed for challenging work assignments on the past job and listening and following directions on the new job. Table 9 lists mean scores indicating any amount of perceived impact for total respondents group, educational level subgroups, and job classification subgroups.

Table 9. Perceived Impact by Percentage Comparing All Respondents with Educational Level and Job Classification Subgroups

On the Past Job	All Responses	Low Grade	High Grade	Non-Craft Job	Craft Job
Challenging work assignments	67.0	71.1	56.5 *	77.4 *	60.7
Think of better ways to do a task or project	68.2	71.1	60.8	74.1	64.7
Communication skills	62.1	64.4	56.5	67.7	58.8
Work better with co-workers	65.4	67.7	59.0	70.9	62.0
Listen and follow directions	70.7	66.1	82.6 *	67.7	72.5
Time management	69.5	76.2	52.1 *	77.4	64.7

Transition Period					
Understand local job conditions and trends	98.7	98.1	100	96.6	100
Improve writing skills	94.8	92.7	100	90.0	97.8
Develop an educational plan	90.9	87.2	100	83.3	95.7
Develop a job search plan	92.2	92.5	91.3	93.3	91.4
Interviewing skills	96.2	94.5	100	96.5	96.0
Improve reading skills	92.3	92.7	91.3	96.5	89.7

On the New Job					
Challenging work assignments	100	100	100	100	100
Think of better ways to do a task or project	100	100	100	100	100
Communication skills	96.2	94.2	100	93.3	97.3
Work better with new co-workers	96.2	94.2	100	93.3	97.3
Listen and follow directions	90.5	85.7	100	80.0 *	94.7
Time management	96.2	94.4	100	93.3	97.3

Social Roles and Interactions					
Use a computer to learn new things	92.8	90.0	100	95.0	91.6
Improve reading skills at home	75.7	72.2	87.5 *	76.6	75.0
Try new hobbies or leisure activities	87.8	83.3	100 *	90.0	86.3
Enhance role as spouse or parent	94.8	92.4	100	93.1	95.8
Smarter shopper/customer	88.4	85.4	95.6	90.0	87.5
Increase church/community participation	91.3	93.1	86.9	96.7	88.0

* differences between subgroup and total responses more than 10%

Discussion

Some of the findings of this exploratory study support current research in the adult education literature. Specifically, the primary reasons articulated by participants for their initial participation in the program mirror the participation literature which suggests that employment-related motives, social interaction, and learning for its own sake are reasons often given for participation (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Additionally, the barriers cited most often for nonparticipation include lack of time and lack of resources (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). In terms of this study, lack of time featured among the participants' responses for not becoming more involved in the program.

With regard to the specific activities comprising each of the four dimensions, more than 95% of respondents indicated that the program made an impact in the following ways: thinking of better ways to perform their new jobs, being able to communicate their experiences and knowledge on their new jobs, being able to understand local labor market conditions, developing an education plan to learn new skills, and accepting more challenging work assignments on their new jobs.

In terms of the four dimensions examined in the study, the findings suggest that the highest level of impact was associated with the period in which respondents were employed in new positions following the plant shut-down. The lowest level of impact was associated with previous positions held at the steel plant. The transition period and social roles/interactions each had moderate levels of impact.

When overall program activity was analyzed according to participant demographic information, only education level made a difference. Respondents with lower educational levels believed the program made more of an impact on their jobs at the steel plant, and those with higher educational levels believed the program made more of an impact in their social lives and interactions. When differences in job classification were analyzed, non-craft respondents reported the program made more of an impact when thinking of better ways to do their past jobs, and craft respondents reported more of an impact on developing better co-worker relationships in their new jobs.

Limitations

Despite the exploratory nature of this initial study, there are several limitations. The use of a non-random sample of 129 active participants certainly warrants caution and precludes generalizability. The use of active participants may also introduce response bias. Additionally, this instrument assesses participant reactions to training interventions, and reports employees' perceptions of long-term learning and potential transfer. Ideally, a comprehensive survey of all past and current program participants or all eligible employees would have been preferred. Both were deemed too unwieldy because of cost, time, and the relocation of former employees following the plant shut-down.

Conclusions

This study represents the first research attempt to evaluate a national, union-sponsored Career Development Program within the steel industry. Although caution needs to be exercised in interpreting these findings beyond this one steel plant which has since been closed, this research provides a foundation upon which future studies can be

built. Specifically, future research initiatives could extend this initial study by broadening the population to include participants in other programs throughout the steel industry.

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The Superiority of Employee-Owned Companies: Reality or Myth?

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This study examined cultural strength of eight manufacturing firms in Ohio by use of questionnaires and discussion with company representatives. Half were employee-owned (ESOP), the other half proprietary or publicly-held. ESOP firms were expected to demonstrate stronger cultures due to employee involvement in managing the business; results indicated non-ESOP firms had stronger cultures instead. Differences among ESOP firms are examined and common assumptions about ESOP firms are analyzed. Suggestions for HRD approaches in newly formed ESOP firms are offered to promote successful transition to employee ownership.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Employee Ownership, Employee Involvement

The past 25 years have seen dramatic growth in the number of employees and private sector organizations embracing employee ownership. This concept is intuitively attractive and appears consistent with current emphases on employee involvement in decision making, teamwork, democratization of the workplace, and strategies to promote employee motivation and high performance. What are the cultures of these firms? Are they demonstrating the characteristics of high performance and democracy touted in current literature?

This study examines the organizational cultures of four firms with employee ownership; similar data are collected and compared for four similar manufacturers who are privately held/proprietary. We expected to see clear advantages of employee ownership with improved performance results, as well as stronger culture factors. The results were surprising and have important implications for human resource development professionals.

Theoretical Framework

Employee Ownership (ESOP)

A number of studies have compared employee-owned firms to comparable nonemployee-owned companies. Employee ownership contributes to greater efficiency (Berman, 1967), productivity (Swad, 1982), employment growth (NCEO, 1995; Rosen & Klein, 1983), sales growth (Quarrey, 1985), and higher pay (Kardas, Keogh, & Schiff, 1998).

The Employee Ownership Index is an index of 357 public companies with 10% or more employee owners which benchmarks the impact of employee ownership among publicly-traded firms. The Index has outperformed other indices of stock market averages since 1991 (Gates, 1998). A closer look at firms included in the Employee Ownership Index shows publicly-traded firms with 20% or more employee ownership are more stable organizations (Blair, Blasi, & Kruse, 1998) and suffer less disruption due to bankruptcy, liquidation, and private buyouts. Among employee-owned firms, the percentage of stock ownership by nonmanagerial employees is a factor linked to higher performance. Sales margin in an earlier study correlates positively and significantly to the percentage of nonmanagerial stock ownership (Conte & Tennenbaum, 1978). Employee ownership does appear to make a favorable difference in company performance.

Employee participation combined with employee ownership is a significant factor in productivity increases. The General Accounting Office conducted several studies to measure the productivity of ESOPs. ESOP adoption did not improve productivity and performance except in firms which established structures for participation. Employee involvement in decision making contributed positively and significantly to productivity (GAO, 1987).

Research of ESOPs in Ohio (OEOC, 1993) show similar trends in terms of job growth and company performance as reflected in national studies: 41% of respondents increased employment, 22% reduced employment,

and 37% showed little change. In comparing these results within their industries: 49% of ESOP firms performed better than their peers, 50% performed as well, and only 1% decreased productivity.

Today, employees own stock in an estimated 11,100 U.S. businesses. There has been steady growth in the number of employee-owned firms since Congress created Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs) through ERISA legislation in 1974. The National Center for Employee Ownership (NCEO) has estimated the number of ESOP and stock bonus plans at 1,600 in 1975, 6,000 by 1985, 10,000 by 1995, and over 11,000 in 1998. The number of employee participants in these plans has grown from an estimated 248,000 employee participants in 1975 to approximately 7.7 million in 1998. The assets of these plans are estimated to be worth about \$400 billion. A 1992 survey conducted by the Ohio Employee Ownership Center (OEOC) indicated that roughly 350 Ohio firms have established ESOPs representing an aggregate employment of about 300,000 persons and plan assets worth \$4 billion.

The US Congress established ESOPs as a way to boost U.S. productivity, increase the retirement income of American workers, and encourage reinvestment in business and industry. Today companies with employee ownership can be found in every location, type, and size of business. While ESOP plans are found in public and private firms of all sizes, a majority of plans are established by small to mid-sized firms. The 1992 Ohio Study found 60% of ESOP companies had 150 or fewer employees, 20% had between 150-200 employees, and another 20% of these firms had over 500 employees. Nationally, most of the growth of ESOPs has occurred in smaller firms as well, according to the NCEO.

The creation of an ESOP often launches a process of cultural change, yet research suggests the transformation, especially among traditional, closely-held firms, is gradual and uneven. For example of Ohio firms surveyed, only 46% regularly provide employees with the company's financial statements, though another 28% of the firms provide financial reports upon request.

Organizational Culture

Assumptions about ESOP firms can also be viewed as demonstrating a stronger organizational culture within ESOPs compared to non-ESOP companies. Stronger cultures are defined as a set of homogenous values and beliefs shared by members of an organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Sathe, 1983; Schein, 1985) or shared practices (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayu, & Sanders, 1990). Strong cultures serve to increase commitment to the organization (Ouchi, 1980), increase productivity (Deal & Kennedy, 1982), and create effective communication practices (Schein, 1985).

Sathe (1983) suggested that culture affects the behavior of organizations relative to cooperation, commitment, communication, decision making, and decision implementation. Schein (1983) argued that organizations develop a culture to create a common vision and goals individuals identify with. Weick (1987) suggested culture helps people develop a sense of trust and confidence in each other's actions. Hofstede et al. (1990) suggested culture is manifested in the daily practices of organizations. Thus research into the culture of any organization can be approached by learning about practices relative to communication, decision processes, cooperation, vision and goals, trust, commitment, and shared ideas.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

The primary research question which emerged from the theoretical framework of this study was "Do ESOP companies possess stronger cultures than non-ESOP companies due to greater involvement of employee owners in managing the business?" From this question several hypotheses emerged: (a) ESOP companies will possess stronger cultures than non-ESOP companies, (b) ESOP companies which are majority-owned by employees will have stronger cultures than those which are minority employee-owned, and (c) majority employee-owned firms will demonstrate greater employee involvement in decision making than minority-owned companies.

Instrumentation

The Organizational Culture Questionnaire (OCQ) was used to collect data for this study. The OCQ contains 62 short statements that describe nine culture factors. These nine factors and the reliabilities are as follows (a) Teamwork (.82), (b) Trust (.70), (c) Risk (.64), (d) Communications (.81), (e) Decision Making (.69), (f) Change (.82), (g) Responsibility (.76), (h) Vision (.52), and (i) General Organizational Issues (.12). The overall reliability for the

instrument as a whole was .95. The OCQ has been used in the private sector, in healthcare, and in schools. A pilot study was conducted at two plants of a large manufacturing firm to obtain reliability data ($N=319$). Respondents were asked to use a Likert Scale indicating the extent of agreement with each of the 62 statements, e.g., 1 = Very Little Agreement, 3 = Moderate Agreement, 5 = Great Agreement. Strength of culture is measured by scores reflecting greater agreement with statements, e.g., 1 or 2 = weaker culture, 4 or 5 = stronger culture. The instrument has construct validity. In a study of six middle schools comparing established and emerging "middle school" characteristics, the Questionnaire distinguished significant differences between group statistics.

Sample

Data were gathered from eight companies who were contacted and agreed to participate. Four of these were employee-owned and were participants in a network of such companies. Four were proprietary or publicly-owned but were not employee-owned. To legally be classified an ESOP, a company must have at least 20% employee ownership. All eight companies were manufacturing firms located in Ohio, U.S.A. In the study sample, ESOP ownership varied from less than 30% to 100%. A total of 682 Culture questionnaires were completed from a possible 1,681 employees from the eight companies for a response rate of 40%. For six of the eight companies, Culture questionnaires were collected on site by the researchers. In the remaining two companies, questionnaires were distributed by company officials and returned by mail.

Results

The Neuman-Keuls Analysis

The Neuman-Keuls analysis provides a method of comparing differences among pairs of organizations. While the original study design anticipated such differences would be between employee-owned (ESOP) and nonemployee-owned (non-ESOP) companies, the analysis also provides data regarding significant differences between all possible pairs, i.e., differences between (a) ESOP and non-ESOP, (b) ESOP and ESOP, and (c) non-ESOP and non-ESOP pairs. This distribution of significant results, although not anticipated in the study design, provides understanding of ESOP and non-ESOP culture comparisons.

Results from Table 1 indicate three ESOP companies had scores in the lower half of the sample of eight. Non-ESOP companies, in contrast, had three of the highest scores. Neither company B or C, which are 100% employee-owned, had scores in the upper half of the score set. Company B had the lowest total score (2.86) among the eight companies. Based upon the theoretical discussion and the ensuing hypotheses, one would expect the ESOP companies to have higher mean scores than their non-ESOP counterparts. Further, one would anticipate the majority-owned ESOPs would have higher mean scores than the minority-owned companies. These results failed to support higher ESOP mean scores overall and higher scores for majority-owned firms.

Table 1

Total Mean Culture Scores. Percentage of Employee Ownership of ESOP Companies

Company	M	% Employee-Owned
A (ESOP)	2.92	33%
B (ESOP)	2.86	100%
C (ESOP)	3.07	100%
D (ESOP)	3.23	<30%
E	3.48	
F	3.15	
G	3.08	
H	2.89	

For the ESOP and non-ESOP comparison, in three cases, there were significant differences between group pairs. However, for two of the three, the non-ESOP companies had higher culture scores than the ESOP companies. In four other comparison pairs the differences were between ESOP and ESOP companies (A *vs.* D, B *vs.* D) or between non-ESOP and non-ESOP (F *vs.* G, E *vs.* H). Company D, as a minority ESOP, scored higher than expected compared to the majority ESOPs (B and C) (see Figure 1).

ANOVA	F = 4.16 F prob. = .0002	Significant at .05 Level
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Newman-Keuls

M		ESOP				non-ESOP			
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
2.92	A								
2.86	B								
3.07	C								
3.23	D	x	x						
3.48	E	xx	xx						
3.15	F								
3.08	G					xxx			
2.89	H				xx	xxx			

x = pairs of significantly different scores within ESOPs. xx = pairs of significantly different scores, ESOP and non-ESOP comparisons. xxx = pairs of significant difference scores within non-ESOPs.

Figure 1. ANOVA and Neuman-Keuls Scores: Total Culture Scores.

While no scores were significantly different within the Teamwork category, the expected difference favoring ESOP teamwork was surprisingly absent given theoretical basis for supposed ESOP superiority. While not significantly different from non-ESOP scores, three of four of the lowest teamwork scores were ESOP companies. In the category of Trust, six of eight significant differences between ESOP and non-ESOP companies demonstrated lower scores for ESOP companies. Only Company A's and D's scores were higher than Company H's score. All other ESOP scores were lower than non-ESOP companies. The results indicate six of seven significant differences

between ESOP and non-ESOP scores for the category of Risk. All but one of these differences showed lower scores for the ESOP companies. Results for the category of Communications were the only score set that had all companies at 3.00 or above. This suggests relatively stronger communications within all eight companies. ESOP companies A and B had the lowest scores and significant differences with Company E, which is non-ESOP. The results for the category of Decision Making indicate that among five significant differences between ESOP and non-ESOP companies, scores were lower than non-ESOP scores in all five instances. These results would seem to be contrary to theoretical framework that suggests superior ESOP performance is due to greater employee involvement in decision processes.

The results for the category of Change and Innovation show two instances of significant differences within the ESOP group (A and B *vs.* D) as well as three instances of significant differences between ESOP and non-ESOP groups (A and B *vs.* E, D *vs.* F). Company D had the second highest score among all eight companies while companies A and B had the lowest scores among the eight participants. Results from this comparison indicate one non-ESOP company as significantly different from all other ESOP and non-ESOP companies in this sample. Although not significantly different, ESOP scores for the category of Responsibility and Commitment represented three of the four lowest scores. As with several other culture categories, companies A, B, and C had the lowest scores while Company D scores were among the highest.

Of note in the results for the category of Vision and Goals are significant differences within ESOP companies (A and B *vs.* C, B *vs.* D) as well as between ESOP and non-ESOP companies. Again, three of four lowest scores in this category are from ESOP companies (A, B, D). Within the category of General Organizational Characteristics, ESOP companies A and B had the lowest scores. Significant differences were seen between companies E and H (non-ESOP) and companies A and B (ESOP).

Discussion

Results from this study indicate non-ESOP companies often possess stronger cultures than ESOP firms. This finding was contrary to expectations that ESOPs would possess stronger cultures (Berman, 1967; Estrin, Jones, & Svejnar, 1987; Swad, 1982). These results were especially surprising since the culture categories of decision making and communications demonstrated higher culture scores for non-ESOP companies. Given assumptions that employee ownership increases decision participation of worker owners and increases business-related communication, these results appear to contradict expectations.

The answers to these contradictory results may be explained by research about differences between ESOPs with formal employee involvement and those with no formal involvement. Research by the General Accounting Office (1987) demonstrated that ESOPs with formal employee participation in decision making had better productivity measures than ESOPs with no formal participation. A study by Moloney (1991) supported the results of the 1987 GAO study. The Moloney study also suggested a "frustration" effect occurs when employee financial participation is not accompanied by participation in decision making. This effect is shown by employee frustration and diminished performance. An earlier study by Cable and Fitzroy (1980) supports improved productivity of high participation employee-owned firms and reduced productivity for low participation employee-owned companies. These results are consistent with Moloney's findings regarding positive productivity for high involvement firms and a "frustration" effect for low participation firm.

A review of 20 years of research about employee ownership and performance by Conte (1992) supported employee ownership as contributing to productivity when accompanied by formal employee participation in decision processes. Conte's review also found the productivity of employee-owned firms without formal participation is no better or worse than non-ESOP companies.

Apparently employee ownership per se is not a single, causal factor in improved firm performance. The current study suggests the culture of ESOP companies is weaker than non-ESOP companies. Weak cultures could contribute to reduced company productivity (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). While the current study does not address firm productivity, it does support the notion that being employee-owned is not in itself an indication of strong culture.

Logue and Patton (1994) studied the reasons for failure and closure of democratically-run ESOPs. Several findings are of interest: (a) Democratic ESOPs were often created to "rescue" a threatened plant closure. Employees sacrificed financially to complete the buyout which provided ownership. Dual and conflicting goals of maintaining profitability and job retention often resulted. This is similar to the "frustration" effect described by Cable and Fitzroy (1980) and Moloney (1991). Conflicting goals may weaken the culture of these companies. Also, troubled companies that become ESOP remain troubled and exhibit weaker cultures, and (b) failed democratic ESOPs often had poor financial and marketing management. This may yield poor company performance, disruption, tension, and

turmoil which can further weaken culture. The expectations of employees who become owners is that democracy and democratic processes will result in their involvement in decision making (Logue, Glass, Patton, Teodosio, & Thomas, 1998). Legally and in practice this "democratizing" may not occur when a firm becomes ESOP. Unmet expectations may contribute to frustration and a weaker culture.

Several factors appear to impact ESOP organizations to, in fact, create a weaker culture. Lack of employee participation in decision making, conflicting goals, weak competitive position at the time of becoming ESOP, and poor management may all individually or in combination contribute to a weaker culture and/or failure. The point of interest for HRD researchers and practitioners is a firm becoming or being employee-owned does not guarantee, in and of itself, participative practices or a strong culture. The current study suggests ESOP companies may have weaker cultures.

In addition to questionnaires completed by employees of the eight participating firms, discussions were held with managers of ESOP companies to the extent of relative employee participation in decision processes. An analysis of the four ESOP companies which participated in this study relative to percentage of employee ownership and employee participation in decision processes indicated the following: (a) Company D, which had the lowest percentage of employee ownership (< 30%) and the highest culture scores, did not have employee participation in decision processes; (b) Company B, 100% employee-owned, had limited employee involvement in decision making and the lowest culture scores of the four participating companies in this study; (c) Company C, 100% employee-owned, had moderate employee involvement in decision processes and the second highest overall culture scores among the four ESOPs in this study; and (d) Company A, which is 33% employee-owned, had moderate employee involvement in decision making and lower culture scores than Company C or D. In summary, no clear pattern emerges among these companies based upon percentage of employee ownership, participative practices, and culture scores.

Conclusions

Organization theory, particularly postulation regarding the nature of culture, participation, worker motivation, and productivity points to employee ownership as a potentially powerful tool to influence positive culture and operating characteristics. Specifically this research was based upon a belief that employee ownership would create firms with stronger culture than for those without employee ownership. Similarly, the greater the percentage of employee owners the more positive would be the effects on culture. Despite a relatively small sample of organizations, the samples were robust and the results were clearly different than anticipated.

We conclude the idealistic projections based upon literature and even existing ESOP research were not supported by our real world data. The variations in "why companies become employee-owned" appear to far outweigh or influence the culture of the ESOP organizations we studied than the social psychological constructs found in texts and journals. Stated differently, organizations become employee-owned for a number of reasons, several of which are not based upon increasing employee motivation or upon sound management principles. Walking into many ESOP organizations would not be different from observing other struggling small businesses, with autocratic leaders and practices, highly hierarchical structures, and little horizontal or upward communication. In practice, being employee-owned does not ensure greater involvement of employees, better informed employees, or employees who are happy with their work and managers.

These results have important implications for HRD professionals. These are (a) Employees embarking on employee ownership require an accurate sense of what such provisions mean to them. Assumptions should be clearly articulated and discussed. (b) The participative structures available to employees should be spelled out in advance and be clearly understood. (c) Open communication should be encouraged and available about operating conditions and variation, and (d) Economic education should be provided to enhance realistic expectations about the job and about prospects for economic growth and profitability. Finally, this research can be viewed as just scraping the tip of the iceberg. Additional study and research is needed to confirm the variation in these findings and to study the effects of controlling critical variables.

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Recruiting and Retaining Women in Business: Women Executives Maneuver To Change the Status Quo

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Preliminary focus group research findings are shared for a group of executive women in a Fortune 500 consumer products company who are working to advance women in their organization. The findings include challenges related to the recruitment and retention of women, and the awareness and actions underling executive women's work for organizational change

Key Words: *Women's Development, Diversity, Career Development*

Today, women comprise 46 percent of the U.S. workforce and 48 percent of the managerial and professional specialty positions (1996, Bureau of Labor Statistics). Working women occupy positions from line workers to CEO's. Yet, women's presence at the top ranks of business has remained stagnant over the last ten years, fluctuating between three to five percent (Eller, 1991; Feminist Majority Foundation, 1991; Powell, 1993). Although women's workforce participation has steadily increased and shows no sign of diminishing on the eve of a new millennium, they lag behind men in pay, promotion, benefits and other economic rewards (Knoke & Ishio, 1998). Despite the progress over the last fifty years, about half of the world's workers are in sex-stereotyped occupations and women work in a narrower range of occupations than do men. A few women have broken through the proverbial glass ceiling, yet, many bump into it. Corporate culture has proven resilient to women's advancement throughout history, because it is typically designed and controlled by a homogenous group of white males (Ruderman, Ohlott, & Kram, 1995; Sharpe, 1994). Women have identified being female and experiencing sexism as the greatest obstacles to advancement (Korn/Ferry and UCLA, 1993), and Tharenou, Latimer, and Conroy observe that, "A male managerial hierarchy is thought to be a critical feature influencing the processes affecting men's and women's managerial advancement" (1994, p. 901). Further, the structure of primarily male managerial hierarchies tends to decrease women's career encouragement and training (Tharenou, Latimer, and Conroy, 1994), and women are expected to demonstrate personal strength and prove themselves more extensively than men before being awarded promotions (Ruderman, Ohlott, & Kram, 1995).

While the prospects for women's advancement do not seem favorable based on the past, some daring executive women are maneuvering to assure change in the future. This study examines their process and results. The theoretical frames underlying this study draw on women's career development and adult learning. Career development literature sheds some light on how adults progress through their careers, but has been criticized for basing models on men's careers, and being insensitive to the multiple roles and responsibilities of women across their life span.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was twofold. The primary purpose was to identify issues related to the recruitment and retention of women in a Fortune 500 consumer products company. The question was based on the company's assumption that it was doing poorly in creating an atmosphere that attracted women. The secondary purpose was to understand how executive women navigate through an endeavor that addresses organizational inequalities in the company. Questions driving this study included:

1. What are the variables contributing to the recruitment and retention of women in the company?
2. How does a group of executive women maneuver through an initiative to improve the status quo for women?

Methodology

Study questions were investigated via a qualitative approach, the primary data collection method being a focus group. The purpose of the focus group was to engage the executive women of the organization in a conversation about the issues of recruitment and retention of women in the company. The focus group participants were primarily executives, and all of them attended the 1998 Catalyst Awards meeting in New York City. Catalyst is a

non-profit organization founded in the sixties by Felice Schwartz. Its mission is to work with for-profit business to advance women in the workplace. The focus group following the Catalyst event, and launched a more long-term diversity initiative and research project than is presented here. This study is unique as the top woman executive of this organization commissioned it. This project is not without risk, and the company and participants shall remain anonymous. I have privileged access to this group and serve as its facilitator.

Data Collection and Analysis

A semi-structured interview or question guide was developed and reviewed with the Vice President of Human Resources in advance of the focus group meeting. The focus group questions were:

1. What are some of the assumptions made about women in the company (by both men and women)?
2. What attracts women to the company?
3. What causes women to leave the company?
4. What causes women to stay with the company?
5. What are some strategies for addressing the organizational issues raised?
6. What actions need to be taken immediately? Long term? By whom?
7. Where do we go from here?

During the focus group, the executives raised and prioritized issues. The three-hour focus group was tape recorded and transcribed verbatim by a transcriptionist yielding 50 pages of single-spaced text. Anonymity of responses was assured with all findings of the study reported as aggregate data. Names of individuals and business units were removed from the analysis. Tapes and transcripts were supplemented with notes and correspondence generated between the Vice President of Human Resources and me. An inductive approach was used for this analysis, also known as constant-comparative analysis. The data were evaluated for common themes, stories and clusters of information. Through constant comparison of themes, categories were derived inductively. The findings were shared with all participants and have been used as a map for further efforts which will be described at the end of this manuscript in the "next steps" section. The limitations of this study include that it represents a single corporation and the results may not be generalizable to corporate America. The focus group methodology may have influenced the data shared. The focus group required these women to risk sharing on a topic that had never been discussed formally in the organization. Individual interviews may yield different information and are planned for 1999.

Findings

Data analysis is still underway, but themes have been identified for the two streams of inquiry in this study. The executive women identified several challenges related to the recruitment and retention of women in the organization. Two themes emerged regarding how a group of executive women learns and navigates through an initiative to improve women's status: (a) Awareness of self and the organization; and (b) action to change the status quo. Each of these categories will be discussed.

Challenges Related to the Recruitment and Retention of Women in the Company

Issues related to recruitment and retention were organized according to the following sub-categories: lack of leadership, lack of strategy to improve representation, different rules for women and men, low flexibility, minimal diversity, few developmental opportunities or plans, and mis-aligned value systems.

Lack of Leadership

There was a sense that management had not shown enough leadership in making diversity a strategic imperative for the business. One participant noted, "Women who are relatively new, leaving after a year or two years or less time than that, because of poor management and leadership." Although the participants generally agreed that leadership was lacking as far as minorities and women were concerned, there was agreement that leadership in recruitment and retention needed to focus on all employees, not just men or not just women.

The Rules are Different for Women

A recruiting challenge raised was that the rules of the game differ across gender lines. One executive complained, "It is my perception that we do try hard, we do put more into it, and need to, to get [ahead]." The concluding sentiment was that women must work harder and longer than men to achieve executive positions.

Low Flexibility

Levels of work flexibility vary across the corporation. The prevailing sense, however, is that there is not enough flexibility as evident by these comments, "We do not offer any type of flexibility," or "We have complete inflexibility about hours." One of the executives who is a new parent recalled, "Day one, when I talked to my boss and he said 'it's eight to six,' and I said 'well how about seven to five,' and he said, 'no, it's eight to six and I really mean it'." This group had little hope about alternative work arrangements, such as working from home.

Minimal Diversity

Lack of diversity was cited frequently. There was frustration about the small representation of women and minorities in upper management, and lack of management action to change this trend, "The fact that [there is] only one woman of color on our management team at all is scary."

Lack of Strategy to Improve Representation

The absence of a plan to improve company representation of women and minorities was raised several times. Here is a sampling of what the participants had to say about this challenge: "I don't think that we're any better recruiting women than men." "I can't think of any specific policies or procedures that we have in place in our organization that are directed towards women." "There really weren't any goals in terms of how many women do we want in these positions, how many minorities, how many real targets." "[There is a] lack of company data, to make any really informed decision". Further, succession planning in the organization was perceived as a group of white men non-systematically discussing people known to them.. As a participant noted, "I don't believe that there really is an all out effort to have representation goals."

Few Developmental Opportunities

The overwhelming sense was that no systematic career development process exists. Some participants have experienced being pushed into new positions with little guidance and low confidence that they are ready and they have been expected to survive as best they could. "I've been pushed into the next position, even though I know I'm not ready, yet, I've been expected to survive, make it, and succeed." "It's still a personal struggle for me, where I'm pushed before I'm ready to fly, and it remains to be seen, whether I'll survive it." This lack of developmental focus prevents women from learning about and training for opportunities across the company. When asked, "What attracts women to your company?" the reply was, "I would hope it is the same thing that attracts men to the company." The participants felt that opportunities were not well communicated in the company. Even though there was dissatisfaction at the level of communication about opportunities, everyone agreed that if opportunities to grow disappeared, they would leave the organization. "Whenever I've left somewhere, it's because the opportunities to continue to grow and learn, and feel empowered, have stopped." The unanswered question, however, is why did the opportunities stop for some of the women? No one attributed it to systemic discrimination of women, however, this question will be followed up in a future study.

Mis-Aligned Value Systems

In some cases, mismatched values presented another retention problem. The focus group expressed values of being continually challenged, and doing work that aligned closely with personal philosophy. No one expressed a current desire to leave, but it was clear that values were important in the following comments: "I don't feel compelled to leave the company, however, at some point, if I were to feel personally compromised . . . then I would leave immediately." Another shared, "I guess I'm getting older, and for me, the values of a company are so much

more important." Another observed, "What has been able to keep me retained, so to speak, is enjoying my work. And then, hopefully, it's in an organization that has a value system that supports my philosophy."

How Women Executives Navigate through Change Initiatives

The assessment of how a group of executive women navigate through a change initiative yielded two themes: (a) awareness self and organization, and (b) action to change the status quo.

Awareness of Self and Organization

The women had a keen sense of their surroundings and spoke about the realities their experience. They shared insight into the organization and themselves.

Inhospitable Environment

The women spoke about the work environment as sometimes being inhospitable to executive women. They identified certain attributes that influence both women's career experiences and decisions to leave. These include better opportunities elsewhere, inflexible working hours, non-recognition of accomplishment, poor leadership and supervision, isolation, and differences between the way executive men and women are treated at the company. One example of different treatment was relayed in a perception that not all-male colleagues are accustomed to dealing with women in executive business roles. As one participant observed,

[Men] are not accustomed to, women [executives], and therefore, they tend to relate to a female peer in the same way that they would relate to their wives, and so, besides trying to do your work, you're also educating them on how to relate to you as a business peer.

The environment also made it harder for women to learn the rules of the culture, and sometimes the women felt isolated. The observation of women who were not successful was, "technically, they were good in their area, but at least one of the things they lacked was knowing how to get around in the company, in the network." The unsuccessful were described as not understanding how to work the system. The women thought a lack of a peer, mentor or confidant at the executive level contributed to failure. The group identified the need for a safe forum to share, learn and vent. A recurring metaphor of the isolation that some of the women felt was iterated through the image of a woman sitting on the edge of her bed wondering if she could carry on. "This is the first company I've worked for where I've had the days that I sit at the edge of the bed and say 'why am I going in in the morning?' I've never had that experience anywhere else." This moment of contemplation resonated with the group as another participant explained:

So when you're sitting on that bed, not wanting to get out, what you're doing is reflecting on that situation so that you can name it. And then put together your strategies to get past it, and I think in the positions that those of us in the room have now, we are faced more so, with those situations that keep us on the beds some mornings, and sitting on that bed, is again, trying to name the situation, identify your strategies, and look at your exit card, to make certain that whatever is on that exit card, hasn't been played, and then think of your strategies when you go in.

Sense of Entitlement

There was also a belief that men felt "owed" advancement by virtue of their positionality in the culture. One participant observed, "I think men . . . have more of a feeling of entitlement in terms of advancement and promotability. . . . I just don't think women can take that for granted." Another executive noted that:

Men seem to be upset if they don't get that promotion . . . it's not that they earned it and they deserve it, [but they feel] darnit, they really should have that. Whereas, I think women . . . feel more, 'Jeez it must be some shortcoming of mine. I'm not trying hard enough, I'm not doing enough.' It's more of an indoor pressure, and then the drive translates from that, as opposed to . . . 'they're wrong because they haven't given it to me.'

Pressure to Perform.

Not only do women put "indoor pressure" on themselves, they also get it from the organization. The participants described tremendous pressure to perform. The collective observation was that it takes women longer to achieve vice president status than men, and that women have to work harder to do it. Further, if women fail in their quest to succeed, it is viewed much more seriously than if men fail. It is generally felt that when men fail in the organization, it is not a notable event. On the other hand, when women fail it is a big deal. One executive observes:

If that woman could [not] succeed she was weak. Now if a man doesn't make it, it doesn't matter, because if you have a hundred men, and one doesn't make it, that's okay. But if you have one woman who's a director and she doesn't make it, she was weak.

Fear of Misperception

Although these women were keenly aware of their environment, they had an interesting fear about their participation in the project to advance women in the company. They were anxious about being perceived as "recipe swapping male-bashers." This thought captures the sentiment, "I had a . . . concern that, . . . we've all participated in these kinds of things before, and [someone's] specific experience had been that they're either recipe swaps or male bashing." This woman went on to note how pleased she was with the process and that, "what we had here is clearly showing our level in business thinking, our sophistication as business people, and our understanding what the real issue is." Another woman shared,

[My boss is] gonna ask me, . . . gonna put me in a room and say, 'what did they say, what did they do? You know tell me everything.' Not because he's suspicious, but he just has to have his hands in everything. I really was sort of expecting this to be, not necessarily a male bashing thing, but when I left the other day and [my boss] said, 'have fun, what do you think they're gonna do?' I said, 'I don't know, we'll sit around and say chicks rule,' but I really thought it was gonna be . . . less of a constructive thing, and I'm so impressed... you know some of you I work with, but others I have never met before, and you all are just so articulate, and so you know, just so incredibly impressive, so I'm so glad to be included in your little group.

Pioneering Spirit

These women regarded themselves as pioneers and role models for the future. They regularly referred to themselves as "pioneers" when they were speaking about their roles as executive women in the company. One woman reflected, "If women were to come [here], I think that they would have to like to be the pioneer, and if they didn't like that, then it's really not the place for them." Being a pioneer is not easy." One executive shared, "There certainly have been frustrations along the way, and . . . I've sat on the edge of the bed and said, 'I just can't do this again.'" She felt her investment in her work kept her going. "When I'm sitting here thinking, okay what made you get up and wash your hair and go into the office? . . . at some point you have an investment, be it a personal investment, an emotional investment."

Solidarity

There was a strong disposition to take collective action devoted to women's advancement, for instance, "I'm a firm believer of the power behind the voice, that we've gotta sing off the same page." Beyond working together to support women's advancement, it was strongly held that there are sound business reasons for pursuing this initiative and that the company would suffer if no action is taken. The women also felt that they could convince the male executives that this was worthwhile by tapping into their competitive spirit, "So we've got that political mindset, and this is about power, [and] when it comes down to it, men see things competitively." Another observed, "It's all around power, and power's a relational concept, and I love it, I want it, and it makes good things." There was general agreement that this process could only be powerful, however, if the women worked in concert.

Action for Meaningful Change

The women were adamant about taking action and were not only thinking strategically about women's advancement, but also, about how to use the power of influential women in the organization to advance this initiative. A participant reflected about the outcome of the focus group's prioritized issues, "I think it's another example that shows how when women are given an opportunity, they are going to think holistically and be business minded, and the myth is that we're just going to take care of our nest." Toward the end of the focus group, the women complimented themselves on being strategic, as this woman noted, "Not one time during our interaction did we not focus on the success of the company as a whole, and how each one of our individual companies could contribute, and I would like that message to be clearly heard by senior management." Another comment was, "We are here because of a commitment to company performance." "By bringing forward what we have here, that's something that's not been done before that will increase market share. . . . We are an untapped resource." The focus group was highly proactive and creative in identifying actions that the company can take in this initiative to advance women. The issues were categorized initially in the focus group. The group prioritized issues and actions and created an action plan. The highlights follow.

Learn Where the Company Stands

The focus group participants wanted information. The group suspected that company performance in advancing women was below par, but facts and figures were not available. There was interest in benchmarking other companies to see how they approached women's advancement.

Secure Management Commitment

Like any organizational initiative, management support is imperative in effecting change. The focus group wanted to see evidence of commitment to this process. The fact that the meeting happened at all was a very encouraging step to the group. Next steps include acting on the actions specified and having a more visible management commitment in this effort. The sentiment was that this commitment is important to retaining key employees.

Create a Plan to Address Recruitment and Retention Issues

When a plan for advancing women was discussed, it was usually centered on "what is it?" The group consensus was that there is currently no plan and that a key outcome of this group's effort would be to develop and implement a plan for the advancement of women in the company. Measurables were called for as well. The women spoke appreciatively of getting the space to make mistakes, free from retribution.

Network

Building strong networks of support, both inside and outside the company was viewed as pivotal to success and necessary for balance. "I think one of the challenges that we as women have [is] as . . . you rise up in the organization, you see less of yourself."

Mentor

Mentoring is the classic developmental strategy, and this group viewed it as a critical developmental process. There was a sense that mentoring was a special responsibility of this group, particularly with women who are at earlier points in their careers. The notion of peer mentoring and learning from everyone in the organization was also discussed.

Cross-Fertilize

A recurring complaint was over little exchange in the company across divisions, whether in job opportunities or information sharing. The women felt that no cross-company commitment for people development existed and they called for more cross-company opportunity. This lack of exchange is viewed as a waste of available resources that may be putting the company at financial risk.

Capitalize on Diversity

There was unilateral support for using peer pressure and the drive to win, to get visibility and action for women's advancement. The women were not aware of any diversity initiatives as one noted, "I can't say that I'm aware of any sweeping initiative to help women." An even more cynical viewpoint about getting male buy-in to diversity was captured in this remark, "Sort of capitalize on that male, I'm the male, I wanna win thing ... [because] this is a marketing issue."

Focus Group Follow-up and Next Steps

At the conclusion of the focus group, the women described some dynamics related to advancement in their company and established an aggressive response to the challenges. Since the initial focus group, this group has corresponded about the issue, held a strategic planning session, reviewed EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) data, named itself "The Advisory Committee," established a mission, created an action plan for presentation to top management, and secured top management support to implement a policy for improving diversity. The next meeting in January 1999 will set the stage to solidify the group's efforts for the future.

Conclusions

Women's career development is a complex, diverse process. Women have made advances in United States organizations, but the consensus is that they have not scaled career ladders fast or high enough. The workforce is becoming more diverse, and it is in the best interest of the US economy to develop women in their careers. Yet, as Fernandez observes, "corporate America as a whole, has failed to effectively address the challenges posed by diversity, particularly with regard to racism and sexism" (1999, p. 3). While the landscape of career development is changing, problems like discrimination and equal access endure. While there are more women in positions of power in organizations, progress has been slow. In 1997, there were 61 female top earners in *Fortune* 500 companies out of a total 2,458 top earners. Women comprised 2.5 percent of the total (Catalyst 1997). This research has provided a glimpse into how executive women align themselves to address women's interests in the corporate setting. It has identified issues important to the career development of women from executive women's perspectives. It has offered several strategies for addressing the challenges of recruitment and retention of women in a tight job market. Finally, it offers an example of how corporate executive women are working to advance women in their own organizations. Yet, this is just one example of how women are working for change in organizations. More initiatives and research are needed to create equitable, accessible workplaces for an increasingly diverse workforce.

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